HOUSE OF THE CACIQUES.*

CHI-CHEN RUINS.

BY B. M. NORMAN.

Situated about three rods south-west of the ruins of the Dome are those of the House of the Caciques, a sublime pile, and in the most perfect state of preservation of all those of Chi-Chen. We cut our way through the thick growth of small wood, and reached the eastern front of the buildings by means of the compass. Here we felled the trees that hid it, and the whole front was opened to our view in good condition, forming a most strange and elaborate piece of workmanship, entirely beyond our comprehension—no order of architecture with which we were acquainted being perceptible. This front measures thirty-two feet, and its height twenty; extending to the main building fifty feet.

Over the door-way, which resembles, in a very slight degree, the Egyptian, is a heavy lintel of stone, containing two double rows of hieroglyphics, with a sculptured ornament intervening. Above these are the remains of carved hooks of stone, with raised lines of drapery running through them; which, apparently, have been broken off by the falling of the heavy finishing from the top of the building; over which, surrounded by a variety of chaste and beautifully executed borders, among which is the unique Chinese, encircled within a wreath is a female figure, in a sitting posture, in basso-relievo; having a head-dress of feathers, cords and



tassels, and neck ornaments. The angles of this building are tastefully curved. The ornaments continue round the sides, which are divided in two compartments; being different, however, in the arrangement, although the style is similar throughout. The large projecting hooks skilfully worked, and perfect rosettes and stars, with spears reversed, are put together with the utmost precision.

The ornaments are composed of small square blocks of stone, cut to the depth of about one to one and a half inches, apparently with the most delicate and perfect instruments, and inserted or held by a shaft in the wall. The wall is made of large and uniformly square blocks of concrete limestone, set in mortar, which appears to be as durable as the stone itself. In the ornamental borders of this building we could discover but little analogy with those known to us. The most striking were those of the cornice and entablature, "chevron,"

*The travels of Mr. Norman in Yucatan have lately excited much attention. The ruins of cities discovered by him prove, beyond a doubt, the former existence of a powerful and refined nation in the heart of Yucatan. But no traces of this once mighty people now remain except the crumbling and half buried edifices and temples which they reared. Mr. Norman has kindly furnished us with a drawing, accompanied by a description of the most remarkable of these ruins. We have had the drawing engraved to illustrate this paper.

and the "cable" moulding, which are characteristic of the Norman buildings.

The sides have three door-ways, each opening into small apartments, which are finished with smooth square blocks of stone; the floors of the same material, but have been covered with cement, which is now broken. The apartments are small, owing to the massive walls enclosing them, and the acute-angled arch forming the ceiling. The working and the laying of the stone are as perfect as they could be under the directions of a modern architect.

Contiguous to this front are two irregular buildings. The one on the right, situated about twenty feet from it, (about two feet off the right line) has a front of about thirty-five feet, ten wide and twenty high; containing one room similar to those before described. The front of this building is elaborately sculptured with rosettes and borders and ornamental lines; the rear and sides formed of finely cut stone, but which are now much broken. Near by are numerous heaps of hewn and broken stones, sculptured work and pillars.

The other building, on the left, is about eight feet from the principal front, measuring twenty-two feet in length, thirteen in width, and thirty-six in height. The top is quite broken; and has the appearance of having been much higher. The "Cactus" was growing thriftily upon its level roof. On all sides of this building are carved figures, broken images, in sitting postures; rosettes and ornamental borders, laid off in compartments; each compartment having three carved hooks on each side and angle. This building contains but one room similar to that on the right. Soil is collected on the tops or roofs of these structures to the depth of three to four feet, which is covered with trees and other vegetation.

From these portions of the ruins we worked our way through the wild thicket, by which they are surrounded, to the north side of the main building; in the centre of which we found a flight of small stone steps overgrown with bushes and vines; which we cut away and made an ascent, by pulling ourselves up to the summit, a distance of forty feet. This platform is an oblong square, one hundred by seventy-five feet. Here we found a range of rooms, occupying about two-thirds of the area; the residue of the space probably formed a promenade, which is now filled up with crumbling ruins, covered with trees and grass. These rooms varied in size; the smallest of which measured six by ten, and the largest six by twenty-two feet.

The most of these rooms were plastered, or covered with a fine white cement; some of which was still quite perfect. By washing them off we discovered fresco paintings—but they were much obliterated. The subjects could not be discerned. On the eastern end of these rooms is a hall running transversely four feet wide, (having the high angular ceiling) one side of which is filled with a variety of sculptured work; principally rosettes and borders, with rows of small ballustrade pillars and pilasters; having three square recesses, and a small room on either side. Over the door-ways of each are stone lintels, three feet square, carved with hieroglyphics, both on the front and under side.

The western end of these rooms is in almost total ruins. The northern side has a flight of stone steps, but much dilapidated, leading to the top; which, probably, was a look-out place, but is now falling to pieces.

The southern range of rooms is much broken; the outside of which yet shows the elaborate work with which the whole building was finished.

We vainly endeavored to find access to the interior of the main building. Two apertures were discovered; caused, probably, by the vastness of the pile, or by some convulsion of nature. In these apertures we made excavations, but could not discern any thing like apartments of any description. It seemed to be one vast body of stone and mortar, kept together by the great solidity of the outer wall; which was built in a masterly manner, of well-formed materials; its angles finished with circular blocks of stone of a large and uniform size, in good keeping with the whole.

